

Learning from EUTF-funded projects and programmes supporting youth across West Africa

CASE STUDY – ERASMUS+

Altai Consulting for the European Union – 2025



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EUTF MONITORING AND LEARNING SYSTEM (MLS)

The EU Trust Fund (EUTF) Monitoring and Learning System (MLS) was initiated in July 2017 and is being implemented by Altai Consulting. The overall objective of the MLS is to strengthen EUTF interventions through the creation of a monitoring and learning system, which should provide an evidence-based approach for programming and implementing interventions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) was established to address the root causes of irregular migration and displacement across Africa, with a particular focus on fostering stability, economic opportunities, and resilience in vulnerable communities. Within this framework, youth have been identified as a critical demographic, given their disproportionate vulnerability to unemployment, social exclusion, and migration pressures. Recognising the transformative potential of youth empowerment, the EUTF has funded numerous projects across West Africa aimed at improving youth livelihoods, enhancing skills development, and promoting social inclusion.

This case study is part of a broader learning initiative commissioned by the European Union (EU) to learn from EUTF-funded programmes supporting youth. The first phase involved a comprehensive mapping of youth-focused interventions within the EUTF portfolio, followed by a more in-depth analysis of 30 selected projects/programmes. This phase aimed to map the diversity of approaches, geographical coverage, and thematic areas, while identifying trends, successes, and challenges across projects. The second phase consisted of case studies of selected initiatives. These case studies aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how specific interventions addressed the needs of youth, adapted to local contexts, and contributed to sustainable development outcomes.

1.2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of the case studies conducted by Altai is to **identify good practices and lessons learned from selected EUTF-funded projects, to feed into future EU programming supporting youth in West Africa**. Among the four selected projects/programmes¹ is Erasmus+, a European programme which benefitted from EUTF funding between 2018 and 2022 to support student mobility in 16 west African countries: 12 countries from the EUTF SLC window (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and The Gambia) and four additional countries that benefitted from EUTF-funded programming (Benin, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Togo).

Altai collected, analysed and triangulated data from two main sources: in-depth **document review** (Erasmus+ documents, national and EU youth strategies, etc.) and **43 key informant interviews** conducted remotely and in Dakar, Senegal, with various stakeholders (Erasmus national agency representatives, European and West African universities, EU Delegation, beneficiaries) from several countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Finland, France, Mauritania, Senegal, Spain and Togo. Altai adopted a snowball sampling approach aimed at maximising the chances to get interesting feedback and gather a large and heterogeneous sample deemed broadly representative². The list of people interviewed can be found in Annex 5.1 and 5.2.

¹ In the context of the EUTF, “programme” refers to a coherent set of actions that may encompass multiple projects, whereas “project” refers to a specific operational intervention.

² The process began with the Erasmus+ focal point within the EU, who directed the team to a selection of national Erasmus+ agencies. These agencies then connected Altai with national EU higher education institutions (HEIs), which in turn referred the team to their West African partner HEIs, which subsequently facilitated contact with programme beneficiaries. Altai followed the broadest possible outreach strategy, engaging every contact shared and conducting interviews with all who responded. The aim was not to achieve statistical representativity of EUTF-supported mobilities – especially as these are not distinctly identifiable within the wider Erasmus+ programme – but rather to collect rich, diverse feedback from various stakeholders across the mobility chain. This strategy enabled Altai to capture a wide range of perspectives on programme implementation, relevance, and impact.

The analysis is structured into two phases: (1) **analysis of the project design** (relevance, coherence, reach, and sustainability, focusing on adaptation to local contexts, alignment with EU and national strategies); and (2) **analysis of project results** (using the EU Youth Action Plan 2022–2027 as a framework, revolving around three pillars – Engage, Empower, and Connect – outlined further below). **Lessons learned** and **good practices** are identified and presented throughout the different sections.

1.3. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Erasmus+ is an EU programme that aims to support education, training, youth, and sport through a wide range of initiatives. One of its flagship actions – and the focus of the present case study – is the International Credit Mobility (ICM) initiative. Erasmus+ ICM allows students (as well as teachers and administrative staff) to travel abroad for a period of study or an internship (teaching or training for staff) within a cooperation framework between two higher education institutions (HEI). Academic credits earned at the host university are then recognised and transferred to the home institution upon return, thanks to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Initially developed for student mobilities within Europe, Erasmus later expanded its activities, beneficiaries and geographic scope, becoming Erasmus+ in 2014, to allow student exchanges beyond the EU.

EUTF supported two funding rounds for Erasmus+, in 2018 and 2019, totalling EUR 10 million for mobilities from West African countries to Europe. Although it is not possible to specifically identify which individual mobilities were financed by EUTF funds versus Erasmus+ core funding, the EUTF contributions were allocated to support a defined number of mobilities, allowing for 521 individual mobilities in the 2018 call (EUR 4 million) and 1,446 mobilities in the 2019 call (EUR 6 million). While these include both student exchanges and staff mobilities (e.g. teaching and administrative personnel), this case study focuses specifically on student mobility, in line with the purpose of the broader study commissioned to Altai. It is important to note that this case study does not focus specifically on mobilities funded by the EUTF, as it is difficult to isolate these from the total number of mobilities supported by Erasmus+ during this period. Instead, it aims to analyse the broader dynamics and implications of ICM for students from West African universities to European HEIs.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. APPROACH AND DESIGN

2.1.1. RELEVANCE

2.1.1.1. Contextual analysis and intervention design

Erasmus+ was neither designed, nor managed, under the EUTF; it was a preexisting EU programme which benefitted from one-time EUTF funding. Therefore, there was no contextual analysis or intervention design specifically developed in the context of the EUTF.

EUTF funding to Erasmus+ appears relevant given both the youth-related context in West Africa and the EUTF's objectives. In the last 40 years, West Africa and more broadly Sub-Saharan Africa have witnessed a significant surge in school enrolment rates, particularly in tertiary education, where the region has recorded the highest growth globally.ⁱ For instance, in Ghana, student enrolment in higher education institutions doubled over the last decade,ⁱⁱ reflecting a broader regional trend driven by expanding access to education. With the rapidly growing youth population in the region, even more young people are expected to seek higher education in the coming years. At the same time, youth face difficulties in securing employment due to the quality of education, challenges in the recognition of diplomas, inadequacy between the training provided and labour market needs, or limited job opportunities. In this context, initiatives supporting education and training opportunities represent relevant tools for improving young people's prospects. Student exchanges also offer a legal and constructive alternative to irregular migration, especially in a context where legal migration pathways are limited. As such, student mobility aligns with the EUTF's objectives, which include addressing the root causes of irregular migration by promoting economic opportunities and improving employment prospects for young people.

Focus box: Expanding Erasmus+ to include vocational training mobility for youth from West Africa as a potential opportunity for programme enhancement

Creating mobility opportunities in vocational education and training could be particularly relevant for West African countries. These countries are showing a growing interest in vocational training to tackle issues related to youth employment and better align skills with local economic realities.

Vocational education and training (VET) is a sector included in the Erasmus+ programme, and similar to higher education, there are ICM opportunities between VET centres. However, these opportunities are not currently available for incoming mobilities from non-EU countries. Up to 20% of the funding designated to EU VET centres for mobility projects can be used internationally, but this only applies to outgoing mobilities of European students travelling to non-EU countries.

In a context where investment in human capital and skills has been declared one of the priorities for the 2024–2029 European Commission,³ expanding – both incoming and outgoing – mobility opportunities in vocational education and training appears timely and appropriate, and particularly relevant for West African students.

Additionally, **doctoral mobility represents another opportunity** to bridge the gap between higher education and the professional world (see more under 2.2.3).

³ See Ursula von der Leyen's Statement to the plenary session of the European Parliament, 18 July 2024. Retrieved [here](#).

EUTF funds were used to support ICMs, allowing students to travel abroad for a period of study or an internship within the framework of cooperation between HEIs in Erasmus+ programme countries and those in partner West African countries⁴. The study period or internship abroad is then academically recognised by their home institution upon return. At the EU level, the strategic direction and overall supervision of the Erasmus+ programme are the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission. Student mobilities belong to the decentralised actions of the programme which means they are implemented through indirect management, by national agencies, responsible for their implementation at the national level.

Erasmus+ projects are submitted exclusively by the HEIs of Erasmus+ programme countries to the Erasmus+ national agencies. Third-country HEIs have no direct contact with Erasmus+ agencies and are included in mobility projects as partners to European HEIs. Mobility projects are submitted for a period of 24–36 months during which a certain number of student exchanges will take place. At the submission stage, any HEIs in an Erasmus+ programme country can apply, provided it has signed the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). Mobility projects are then assessed according to the award criteria set out in the annual Erasmus+ Guide: 1) project design and cooperation quality; 2) strategic relevance; and 3) impact and dissemination. The 2021–2027 Erasmus+ roadmap also sets horizontal dimensions that must be supported by mobility projects: inclusion and diversity; environmental sustainability; digitalisation; and civic engagement. Key informant interviews (KIIs) repeatedly highlighted inclusion as a priority, reflecting efforts to address past criticisms regarding the programme's limited inclusivity. While some stakeholders interviewed by Altai also mentioned the importance of co-constructing projects with third-country partner institutions, their involvement in project design is not mandatory and varies depending on the organisations involved. In some cases, partner organisations mentioned being consulted only to confirm interest and slots allocation, while in others, partner universities initiated the mobility projects themselves.

This highlights the central role played by European HEIs in project design and implementation. While Erasmus+ sets out several criteria and overall guidelines, mobility project design and operationalisation can take different forms and are largely shaped by the mode of engagement and approach to programme participation used by European HEIs.

Focus box: hybrid mobility, illustrating the importance of flexibility to improve relevance

Erasmus+ showed flexibility in developing a model of hybrid mobility, which includes a remote phase prior to the experience abroad. This approach was initially designed to enable shorter mobilities (under the minimal duration of two months) for students with personal constraints, such as those who have an employment or parenting responsibilities. These mobilities promote greater inclusivity and have proven useful in creating connections between participants before the actual mobility, thereby facilitating social inclusion and the in-person experience. While hybrid mobility showcases an example of direct and relevant adaptation to specific limitations that can be encountered by potential beneficiaries, it seems however important to maintain a minimum duration of the experience abroad for it to remain impactful. Some beneficiaries interviewed reported spending only a week abroad, and while they appreciated their experience, it appears less likely to have a significant impact on their academic journey.

2.1.1.2. Relevance of activities and targeting

Financial support is the only direct support provided by Erasmus+ to beneficiary students. Erasmus+ provides financial support, covering living expenses and airplane fees for student ICMs. The scholarship provides a fixed amount of EUR 700–850 depending on the host country (regardless of the

⁴ Erasmus+ programme countries are those that participate fully in the Erasmus+ programme by establishing a national agency and contributing financially. These 33 countries include the 27 EU Member States and six third countries associated with the programme: Iceland; Liechtenstein; Norway; North Macedonia; Serbia; and Turkey. Partner countries are all other countries in the world.

host city), and travel costs are calculated based on a distance band. This mobility grant is provided to the student upon arrival in the host country. Other kinds of support depend on the sending and receiving universities.

While non-financial support falls outside the direct scope of the Erasmus+ intervention, it remains a highly relevant and often decisive factor in shaping the overall mobility experience.

By signing the ECHE, HEIs commit to providing all the necessary support to mobile participants, including active support throughout the housing search process and assistance with visa procedures. However, KIIs highlighted wide variations in the level of support provided: some universities demonstrate a high level of support and involvement in organising and managing the logistical aspects of the exchanges (including accommodation management, airport reception, transport arrangements, and direct contact with the embassy to initiate visa procedures), while others offer significantly less support. According to beneficiaries, the level of involvement, support and facilitation provided by both sending and receiving institutions is key to ensuring a smooth and positive exchange experience. This support can vary greatly depending on factors, such as the structure of the international relations departments at the universities, whether a dedicated person or unit oversees mobility support, and the institution's experience with Erasmus+ exchanges. Beneficiaries met by Altai emphasised the need for support services with strong process knowledge to facilitate administrative and logistical procedures, from visa identification and documents preparation, to securing suitable accommodation. In several cases, gaps in support were noted by students, who expressed regret at not having been better accompanied throughout the process.

Focus box: Erasmus Mundus, illustrating the importance of comprehensive support

Erasmus Mundus, like Erasmus+ ICM, is a component of the broader Erasmus+ programme. It offers joint master's and doctoral degrees delivered by a consortium of universities across Europe and beyond. Like Erasmus+ ICM, Erasmus Mundus provides scholarships but for longer periods, sometimes covering the entire duration of the degree programme. These joint degrees constitute long-term partnerships, with mobilities taking place every year. This type of partnership creates a high level of efficacy and fluidity in managing the mobility processes, as the institutions involved are experienced in developing and supporting student exchanges. Beyond the longer duration of the exchange and the awarding of a joint or double degree, this modality appears particularly relevant for developing well-structured coordination and highlights the importance of smooth process management throughout the mobility experience.

The EU has set indicative targets for Erasmus+ regarding geographical balance and priorities by region. The Erasmus+ objectives set by the EU need to be achieved at the European level over the full duration of the 2021–2027 programme. While these targets are not required to be met individually at the HEI level, they can be taken into account by national agencies when allocating available funding. For Sub-Saharan Africa, at least 35% of the mobility budget is expected to go to least developed countries (LDCs)⁵, with a special emphasis on migration priority countries, and no more than 8% of the budget allocated to a single country. The lower representation of LDCs among mobility flows could be explained by the fact that universities in LDCs are typically younger institutions, with fewer established international partnerships and less experience navigating Erasmus+ procedures. However, data shared by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture indicates that EUTF-funded mobilities did meet the 35% target, with 36% of mobilities from West Africa involving LDCs. In practice, partnerships seem to be shaped more by historical and/or institutional ties between universities than by national strategies. European universities have the lead in designing and submitting mobility projects

⁵ According to the UN, among the 16 countries included in the EUTF SLC window (12) or that have benefited from EUTF-funded programming (4), 11 are classified as LDCs: Benin; Burkina Faso; Chad; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Mali; Mauritania; Niger; Senegal; The Gambia; and Togo. (The remaining five countries – not classified as LDCs – are: Cabo Verde; Cameroon; Côte d'Ivoire; Ghana; and Nigeria).

to Erasmus+ agencies. As a result, while taking into account Erasmus+ guidelines, factors such as existing networks, past collaborations, long-standing institutional relationships, as well as individual internationalisation strategies tend to be significant drivers of the geographical repartition of mobility projects.

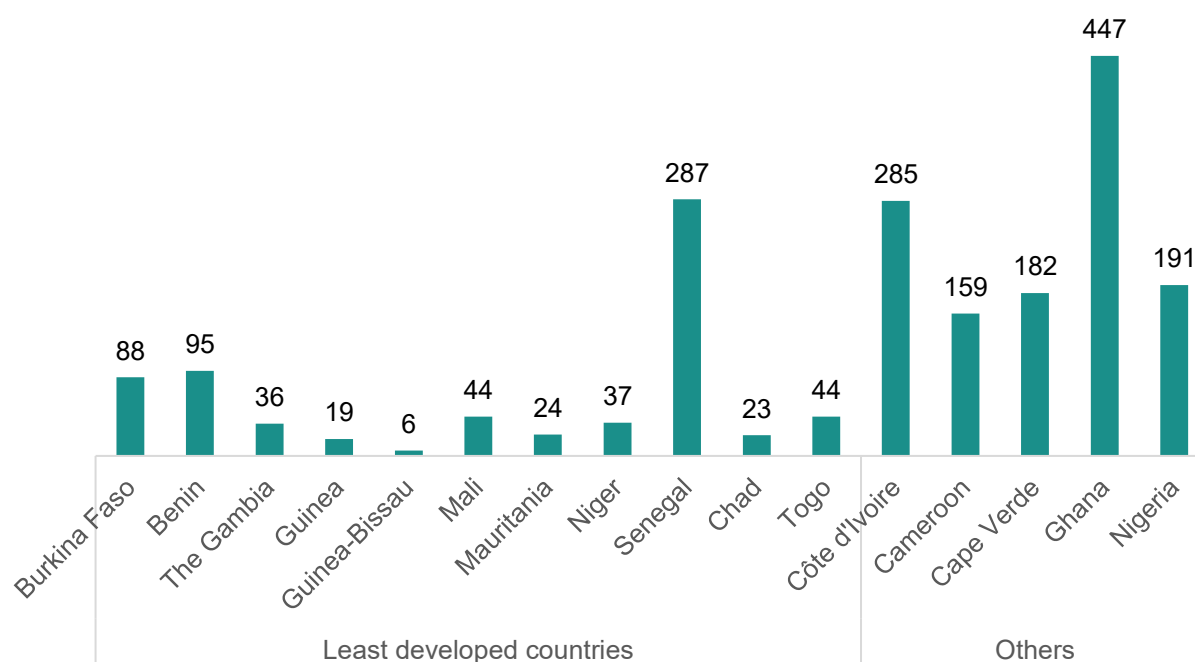


Figure 1: Number of mobilities supported by country between 2018 and 2022

At the institutional level, there is no pre-selection or targeting of universities on the EU side; all HEIs in the 33 Erasmus+ programme countries that hold the ECHE are eligible to submit mobility project proposals. Funding allocation depends on the quality and relevance of submitted projects, assessed during the application stage. In their project design, European HEIs choose their West African partners based on factors including their own internationalisation strategies, prior collaborations and established partnerships, implementation capacity and responsiveness. In some cases, Erasmus+ is also used as an opportunity to initiate new partnerships, using the programme as a foundation for the development of longer-term cooperation. Some HEIs also mentioned taking into account inclusion policies in selecting partner institutions.

Regarding the selection of beneficiaries, academic excellence is the main selection criterion – encouraging equal opportunities. In some cases, language requirements are also added, depending on the host country or field of study. This criterion can represent a barrier for certain students, both academically and financially, when language certifications are required. 'Inclusion' is also increasingly encouraged under Erasmus+ and appears to be a factor taken into account by many institutions, according to KIIs. Although no specific criteria or standards are formally set in this regard, and selection remain at the discretion of participating institutions, most HEIs reported considering socio-economic factors, such as family income, disability, and overall vulnerability in their selection processes.

However, despite efforts to promote inclusion, economic barriers remain a significant limitation for many students. The Erasmus+ grant is only provided once the student arrives in the host country, requiring beneficiaries to initially cover the costs of airfare and visa fees. This creates a financial limitation that may unintentionally favour students from more privileged backgrounds. Recognising these limitations, the new Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027) has strengthened its focus on inclusion. An inclusion supplement (of EUR 250 monthly) has been introduced to provide additional financial

support to participants with fewer opportunities.⁶ In a few cases, European universities went further, and advanced travel costs themselves, although this entails financial risk, as any incomplete mobility requires reimbursement to Erasmus+.

Another central challenge, mentioned by many stakeholders, lies in the procedures and difficulties of obtaining visas. From the initial application to obtaining a visa, the process can be complex and both time-consuming and expensive, with students often struggling to access clear information and adequate support. They often face difficulties identifying the correct type of visa and the necessary documentation, securing an appointment, or covering visa fees, which are not included in the Erasmus+ financial support. The situation is even more challenging for students residing in countries without a national representation of the host country of the intended mobility, as they may need to travel to a neighbouring country to complete the required formalities, adding further logistical and financial burdens. While this issue is less common for countries with a broad diplomatic presence in West Africa, such as France or Germany, it is more prevalent for other European countries whose consular services are less accessible in the region (e.g. Finland). Despite fulfilling all the required formalities, there is no guarantee that the visa will ultimately be approved, making the entire process uncertain at the risk of discouraging potential Erasmus+ beneficiaries. This challenge is not specific to Erasmus+; KIs highlighted that this is a common limitation across mobility programmes, including bilateral ones.

2.1.1.3. Lessons learned

A major lesson learned from the Erasmus+ experience in West Africa is the importance of comprehensive support – including financial, administrative and logistical support – to ensure the smooth implementation of mobilities and greater inclusion. The main types of support and challenges encountered in this regard are detailed below.

- **Anticipated financial support could greatly enhance Erasmus+ inclusivity approach.** Although Erasmus+ provides valuable funding, the requirement for students to pay upfront all costs before arrival in the host country is a significant limitation to inclusivity. This financial burden compromises the programme's inclusion efforts, making it unintentionally exclusive by favouring students who can afford upfront expenses. To ensure equal access to mobility opportunities, funding schemes should consider covering all necessary expenses (including visa fees), and in advance – through direct booking of travel, for example –, to remove economic barriers that limit participation.
- **Institutional and consular support and coordination can play a key role in facilitating administrative procedures.** It appears essential that university services responsible for supporting outgoing mobility develop a strong understanding of visa procedures and the specific types of visas required, in order to provide accurate guidance and avoid delays or rejections. Equally important is the need to strengthen the awareness of Erasmus+ among consular services and to establish closer, structured relationships between universities and consulates. Such collaboration can significantly ease administrative burdens for students and improve the efficiency of visa processing, and has indeed proven effective in some cases, where the existence of a focal point between certain universities and consular services enabled the resolution of visa issues shortly before planned departures. More broadly, stronger engagement and commitment from Erasmus+ Member States would be needed to actively

⁶ The Erasmus+ inclusion support is granted to participants who meet at least one of the following eligibility criteria: having a disability or health condition, facing economic or social barriers (e.g. low income), or bearing family responsibilities such as childcare.

support the visa process, ensuring their national procedures are aligned with the programme's objectives and facilitate, rather than hinder, access to mobility opportunities.

- **Addressing logistical and practical aspects can contribute to more effective mobility support services and ensure smoother experience for beneficiaries** – such as assistance in accessing accommodation, local transportation, or opportunities for social and cultural integration. Ensuring that both sending and receiving universities are actively engaged in providing this comprehensive support is essential. Some beneficiaries interviewed by Altai mentioned receiving such support and the highly positive impact it had on their experience, underlining the importance of generalising and systematising these good practices. Pre-departure orientations, welcome services, peer mentoring, or intercultural/social integration activities can all play a significant role in helping students plan their mobility and settle into their new environment. To guarantee consistent and effective support, mobility projects should focus on strengthening the institutional capacity and encouraging the engagement of all stakeholders. Promoting a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem, along with a culture of shared responsibility among all parties, could help ensure smoother implementation and greater mobility experiences.

Opening vocational education and training (VET) mobility opportunities for West African students could help address employment challenges and support the development of skills adapted to local economic needs. VET mobility holds significant potential for West African countries showing a growing interest in this training modality, and where youth employment and skills adaptation to local economies are pressing challenges. While Erasmus+ supports VET mobility, current opportunities are limited to outgoing European students, excluding incoming mobilities from third countries. Expanding VET mobility to include incoming West African students could support the development of labour market-relevant skills and align with national education and training needs and priorities in the region.

Ensuring third-country HEIs involvement in project design could foster interventions' alignment with beneficiaries' needs and national priorities. A collaborative approach can help prioritise key competencies, priority sectors, and skills development relevant to the local contexts, while also aligning with beneficiaries' needs, capacities and interest. Co-constructing also fosters stronger partnerships and increases institutional ownership.

Developing language learning opportunities and access to certifications could increase eligibility – as it is often a selection criterion to access mobility opportunities. Beyond the challenge of meeting the required language level, there is a financial barrier in accessing official certification when not integrated into the student's curriculum. In some cases, this criterion could also be reconsidered: while minimum requirements are important for beneficiaries to be able to settle into their environment, language is also a skill that can be developed relatively quickly when immersed in a new environment. A more flexible approach to language requirements does not seem unrealistic, as illustrated by many intra-European mobilities, for example, where language requirements appear to be less decisive, without compromising the success of the mobility experience.

2.1.2. REACH

2.1.2.1. Outreach strategies

In Europe, Erasmus is a widely known and well-established programme. All 33 programme countries have national Erasmus agencies responsible for developing, promoting, and implementing the programme. As a result, universities and students are generally well informed about Erasmus+ opportunities, particularly the flagship student exchange programme.

In contrast, there does not seem to be an official and systematic Erasmus+ outreach strategy in third countries. Erasmus+ remains primarily an EU-centred programme, where national agencies

contract directly with European HEIs, while institutions in West Africa participate as partners through mobility projects. This means that West African universities do not have direct access to Erasmus+ agencies and can only exchange with and contribute to the programme through indirect partnerships. While some initiatives do exist to promote Erasmus+ opportunities abroad – e.g. information events or communications efforts led by EU Delegations – these are not part of a broader, systematic outreach strategy. A broader communications strategy could be relevant to reach smaller institutions, including those in rural areas, and to promote greater inclusivity and equal opportunities beyond major universities. However, this should be accompanied by adequate support measures to ensure that mobilities can effectively take place. Another condition for participating in Erasmus+ is the ability to offer academic programmes that are compatible with those of European HEIs. Therefore, expanding access to Erasmus+ would require both targeted capacity-building to help potential partner institutions implement mobility projects and enhance their academic offerings where needed, and efforts to encourage European institutions to establish partnerships with them.

At the HEI level, communication often occurs through individual exchanges between professors and students rather than through broad information campaigns. According to interviewees, students who are deemed good candidates for the programme are typically informed about mobility opportunities by one of their professors and encouraged to apply. West African universities then submit a shortlist of candidates, which is discussed and validated jointly with the partner European HEIs.

This case-by-case communication does not appear to be a major issue, for two main reasons. First, the central selection criterion – academic excellence – can be objectively verified, even if other criteria, such as inclusion criteria, are not formally assessed by European HEIs. Second, given the current limited number of slots and the selective nature of the programme, a targeted communication approach may also be appropriate to manage expectations. Maintaining a certain balance between the level of information and dissemination, and the available opportunities seems relevant to avoid potential disappointments. Nonetheless, the strong interest in Erasmus+ and international mobility more generally among West African youth, suggests a strong potential for expansion.

On a wider scale, according to certain interviews, the EUTF funding of Erasmus+ mobilities seems to have contributed to significantly increasing the volume of mobilities from West Africa and actively promoting cooperation with West African universities that had previously received less attention. Since 2021, West Africa has witnessed a significant increase in outbound mobilities, with a total of 1,532 mobilities in 2024, compared to 127 in 2017 prior to EUTF funding, and has become the most significant region for the programme according to a key informant within the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission.

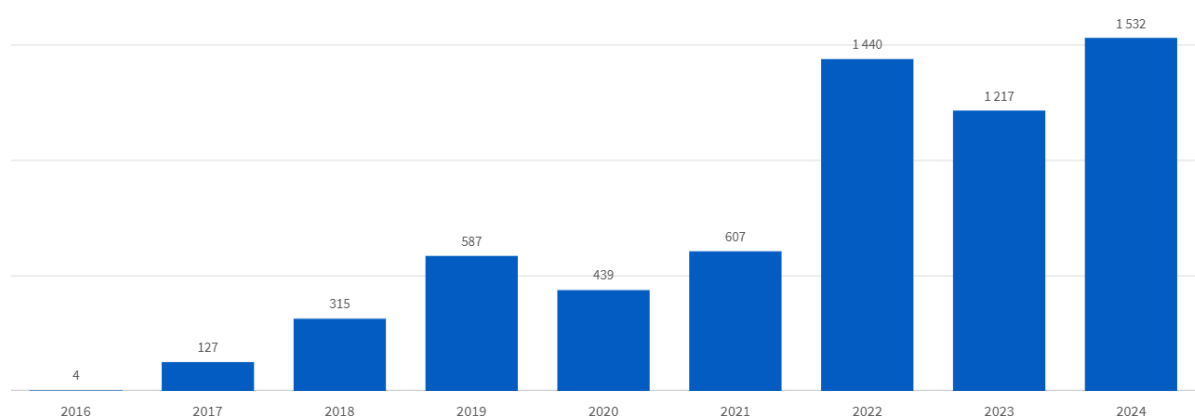


Figure 2: Evolution of outbound mobilities among West African students per year⁷

2.1.2.2. Lessons learned

Lessons learned regarding programme outreach concern both students' engagement, and collaboration with third-country universities.

While Erasmus+ selection processes and the actors involved increasingly demonstrate a commitment to inclusion, the development of more precise and standardised inclusion criteria for beneficiaries could foster greater inclusivity, transparency, and objectivity. This could help reinforce and harmonise inclusion efforts across institutions, ensuring that considerations – e.g. socio-economic background, disability, or other forms of vulnerability – are applied consistently and in a harmonised manner. Clearer criteria could support more objective and equitable selection processes, and strengthen accountability to some extent, ultimately making mobility opportunities more accessible to a wider and more diverse group of students.

While students' interest in international mobility suggests clear potential for mobility growth within the Erasmus+ programme in West Africa, it seems relevant to maintain a balance between communication efforts and the actual availability of mobility opportunities. In contexts where the number of slots is limited and the selection highly competitive, overly broad communication may raise expectations that cannot be met, potentially leading to frustration. At the same time, the strong interest in Erasmus+ and international mobility among West African youth highlights a clear opportunity for growth. Modest efforts in outreach and visibility could significantly expand the programme reach, provided that parallel efforts are made to gradually increase the number of available opportunities with the aim to ensure that growing demand is matched by effective and accessible opportunities for participation.

In line with the potential for growth in student participation, greater inclusivity could be encouraged at the institution level in third countries. Diversifying and promoting partnerships with smaller and decentralised institutions would help reach underserved regions beyond major universities. This involves encouraging European HEIs to engage with a wider variety of partners, as well as providing targeted support and capacity-building to smaller institutions – strengthening their academic offerings for greater compatibility with European programmes and offering guidance on project development and management – where needed. This aligns with, and could be further pursued through, the capacity-building component of Erasmus+. Erasmus+ implements capacity-building actions in

⁷ The decline in activity in 2020 and 2021 was due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

higher education by supporting international cooperation projects based on multilateral partnerships between organisations active in the field of higher education. The activities and results of these projects must be geared to benefit partner countries and their higher education institutions and systems. These actions, aiming to improve the quality of higher education, enhance its relevance for the labour market, and improve the level of competences, skills and employability potential of students in HEIs, not only can help increase institutions' chances of participation in the programme, but also directly benefit young people in higher education.

2.1.3. COHERENCE

2.1.3.1. Alignment with youth policies

The Erasmus+ mobility for higher education students aligns with national youth policies in the West Africa region as well as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional youth policy, most of which emphasise education, training, professional integration of young people, and civic engagement. The ECOWAS Youth Policyⁱⁱⁱ recognises the importance of supporting young people through education, career guidance and participation in decision-making, and lists students in secondary and higher education among its priority target groups. As part of its ambition to foster highly qualified and skilled youth across all sectors of human activity, ECOWAS intends to promote the use of information and communications technologies and financial assistance for underprivileged students, which is in line with the Erasmus+ horizontal objectives of promoting inclusion and digital education and skills.

Supporting youth mobility is also consistent with the EU and its Member States' broader objective to strengthen legal pathways for migration. This ambition has been reaffirmed on several occasions, including in the Valletta Action Plan^{iv}, which recognised the importance of encouraging student mobility between Africa and Europe, and specifically mentioned Erasmus mobilities – and other relevant national programmes of EU Member States and associated countries – as tools to support this objective. The Rabat Process – a Euro-African dialogue on migration and development – sets a similar objective of promoting regular migration and mobility (particularly for young people and women) in its 2023–2027 action plan.

2.1.3.2. Lessons learned

Mobility projects should aim to strengthen coherence and synergies among the actors involved. As previously mentioned (see 2.1.1.3), an inclusive and well-coordinated support ecosystem is key to ensuring successful mobility experiences. This requires individual commitment to provide adequate support as well as coordinated efforts, the alignment of actions, and effective communication to ensure comprehensive coverage of beneficiaries' needs. The importance of such coordination is well illustrated by visa procedures, where close cooperation and privileged communication between universities and consular services can significantly facilitate administrative processes.

Erasmus+ national focal points (ENFPs) appear to be a valuable asset, with significant potential to improve the overall implementation of the programme, enhance coordination among stakeholders and ensure even greater alignment of Erasmus+ projects with national priorities and policies in West Africa. Established progressively since 2014 to facilitate implementation of the programme in partner countries, ENFPs are designated among representatives of the education sector. Their role is to promote the Erasmus+ programme and facilitate the participation of local organisations. Their level of development and involvement currently varies depending on national contexts, and they are still being strengthened to better support international cooperation in higher education. In Africa, ENFPs were introduced in 2022. As their capacity continues to be reinforced, they could play a key role in strengthening the overall strategic relevance of Erasmus+ initiatives, promoting the programme locally, supporting the participation of local institutions, and improving coordination among all actors

involved. While ENFPs are currently appointed among representatives of the education sector, with competing responsibilities, appointing dedicated staff to serve as focal points would likely improve their overall effectiveness.

2.1.4. SUSTAINABILITY

In the context of Erasmus+, sustainability perspectives could lie in the development of long-term institutional relations. Emphasis on sustainability in Erasmus+ is not the same as it is in other EUTF-funded programmes, as Erasmus+ started in 1987, and ICMs are structured around time-bound, one-off mobility experiences. As such, traditional notions of sustainability, such as ensuring the continuation of activities after funding ends, are less applicable. However, fostering durable partnerships between institutions and strengthening cross-country academic collaboration contribute to the programme long-term impact, enhancing bilateral and multilateral relationships between the EU and its Member States and third countries.

Student mobility also appears as a powerful tool for fostering connections beyond the individual level, on an international scale. By connecting students across countries, Erasmus+ proves to be an interesting form of 'soft power'. According to several interviews, the experience of mobilities from West Africa to Europe can have a positive impact on perceptions of the EU and its Member States. In some cases, these experiences helped reshape a more balanced, positive – yet also more realistic – understanding of life in Europe, an important outcome in contexts where available information is sometimes inaccurate or overly idealised.

2.2. PROJECT RESULTS

2.2.1. OVERVIEW

The purpose of this section is to assess and learn from project results against the framework of the three pillars of the EU's Youth Action Plan (YAP) for 2022–2027, which guides the EU's work for and with youth in external action:

- **Engage:** youth participation in community, policy, and institutional landscapes
- **Empower:** access to education, employment, livelihoods, and basic rights
- **Connect:** collaboration and cooperation among youth at local, national, and international levels

In line with these objectives, Erasmus+ aims to: (1) empower young people – by providing them with training opportunities abroad and, thereby, fostering their employability; and (2) promote social inclusion and foster civic engagement.

2.2.2. ENGAGE

Erasmus+ does not explicitly prioritise participation at the institutional level as a primary objective, but has great potential to foster engagement with communities, policies and institutions. The objective of fostering civic engagement applies primarily at the EU level, where Erasmus+ aims to cultivate a sense of belonging and strengthen European citizenship. However, mobility experiences involving third countries also hold significant potential for fostering a sense of belonging on a broader, more global scale. By engaging in experiences abroad, young people can develop a sense of inclusion, contributing to a more engaged global youth.

2.2.3. EMPOWER

Erasmus+ mobility serves as an effective tool for empowerment by providing access to training and skills development in an international context. According to interviews with beneficiaries, most

considered it a positive contribution to their academic journey and a strong asset for employability. In some cases, Erasmus+ mobility led to further study, internships, or work opportunities in the host country, offering extended experience abroad and laying the foundation for future career pathways. Doctoral mobility appears particularly relevant in this regard, as the PhD represents a bridge between higher education and the professional world. During their mobility, doctoral candidates often engage with professors, specialists, and fellow researchers working on similar topics. These exchanges sometime fostered opportunities for future research collaborations or projects and can thus facilitate professional integration. Doctoral mobility beneficiaries also highlighted the importance of ensuring alignment between the thesis topics of selected doctoral students and the capacities and expertise of the host universities. In some cases, doctoral students participating in Erasmus+ mobility faced difficulties in finding a supervising professor or host laboratory aligned with their research subject. In the opposite situation, some students whose topics were well aligned with the expertise available at the host institution benefited from a particularly valuable experience. One doctoral mobility beneficiary reported that most of their research was conducted during the mobility period, as they were able to access equipment and tools essential to their work, which were unavailable at their home university.

Most beneficiaries interviewed by Altai described their experience abroad as enriching in terms of cultural openness and intercultural adaptability, beyond the academic and employability benefits. These statements are consistent with the findings of impact studies on Erasmus+, led by the Erasmus+ Observatory, although not specific to mobility from West Africa.^v Some academic staff interviewed also related a greater sense of inclusion and belonging among the youth participating in the programme, resulting from the international mobilities.

2.2.4. CONNECT

Erasmus+ not only an individual experience: it is also a collective initiative creating networks and a sense of wider belonging. Erasmus+ does not provide specific or systematic activities aimed at fostering connections between young people and such connections mostly depend on individual initiatives (e.g. the creation of WhatsApp groups) – either by the students themselves or supported by receiving institutions. Hence, the level of interconnection can vary significantly from one experience to another. However, young participants often meet others from their university or country benefitting from mobility in the same location, through informal networks of support and solidarity. KIIs highlighted the important support role played by former beneficiaries (e.g. by helping with access to housing), either to compensate for insufficient support from university services, or as formally designated mentors for newcomers – as seen in certain joint programmes. Erasmus+ also offers young people the opportunity not only to interact with European students but also to connect with peers from other third countries across different continents, further enriching the intercultural exchange experience.

3. CONCLUSION

Erasmus+ offers valuable insights into both the positive impact of student mobility programmes and the success factors and limitations in their implementation.

Student mobility programmes are relevant on the personal, bilateral, and international levels. At the individual level, mobility empowers students by giving them access to valuable training and skills development in an international setting, often enhancing their academic paths and employability (see 2.2.3). Many beneficiaries reported that these experiences opened doors to further study, internships, or even long-term work opportunities, most often in their host country. Beyond the academic benefits, mobility fosters personal growth, cultural openness, adaptability and a deeper feeling of inclusion.

On a broader level, **Erasmus+ was a catalyst for understanding and cooperation** (see 2.1.4). By connecting individuals and institutions across countries, this programme served as an instrument of soft power, strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties while promoting more balanced, positive – yet also more realistic – perceptions of the EU, including among young beneficiaries from West African countries. Student mobilities also offer a relevant opportunity to contribute to the broader objective of the EU and its Member States to strengthen legal migration pathways (see 2.1.3.1).

This case study highlighted the importance of comprehensive support – financial, administrative, and logistical – in ensuring both smooth implementation and greater inclusion (see 2.1.1.3). The need for anticipated financial support, particularly, appears essential as it directly impacts some students' ability to participate. Non-financial support (i.e. visa procedure, housing access) is also central in shaping a smooth mobility experience. In this regard, the capacities and active involvement of all stakeholders involved are decisive. This also highlights the importance of framing and systematising approaches to ensure harmonised experiences, which otherwise can vary greatly depending on individual engagement and involvement.

Some modalities, such as doctoral mobility (2.2.3), VET mobility (2.1.1.1), or beyond ICM, joint degrees (2.1.1.2) may enhance relevance for youth in West Africa.

4. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
ECHE	Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ENFP	Erasmus+ national focal points
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa
HEI	Higher education institutions
ICM	International Credit Mobility
MLS	Monitoring and Learning System
KII	Key informant interview
LDCs	Least developed countries
VET	Vocational education and training
YAP	Youth Action Plan

5. ANNEXES

5.1. KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED

Organisation	Position	Country
<i>Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD)</i>	Research teacher - Head of the Research and Cooperation Department at the <i>Ecole Supérieure Polytechnique</i>	Senegal
<i>Institut International d'Ingénierie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement</i>	Research teacher - Head of Department of Engineering Sciences	Burkina Faso
<i>Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo de Ouagadougou (UJKZ)</i>	Senior Lecturer - PHD astrophysics mobility manager	Burkina Faso
UCAD	Head of Partnerships	Senegal
<i>Université Aix-Marseille</i>	International Projects Manager	France
<i>Université Aix-Marseille</i>	European Programmes and Mobility Aid Managers	France
<i>Université Aix-Marseille</i>	European Programmes and Mobility Aid Managers	France
<i>Université Aix-Marseille</i>	Cooperation Officer for Africa and the Middle East	France
French Erasmus Agency	Animation and promotion officer - Higher Education Division	France
French Erasmus Agency	Animation and promotion officer - Higher Education Division	France
<i>Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris</i>	Europe Centre Director	France
DUE	Team Leader - Governance and stability	Senegal
DUE	Programme officer	Senegal
French Erasmus Agency	Responsible for the international dimension of Erasmus+ Education and Vocational Training	France
<i>Université de Nouakchott Al Aasriya</i>	Professor	Mauritania
<i>Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny</i>	Research teacher - Erasmus+ national focal point for Côte d'Ivoire	Côte d'Ivoire
<i>Université de Lomé</i>	Director of the Information, External Relations and Cooperation Department	Togo
<i>Université de Lomé</i>	Head of External Relations Division, at the Information, External Relations and Cooperation Department	Togo
<i>Université de Lomé</i>	Head of the Mobility Division, at the Information, External Relations and Cooperation Department	Togo
<i>French Embassy in Senegal</i>	Attaché for academic and scientific cooperation - Higher education focal point	Senegal
<i>Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny (UFHB)</i>	Chef du Bureau des Relations Internationales de la Vice-Présidence chargée de la Planification, de la	Côte d'Ivoire

	Programmation et des Relations Extérieures - Référent ERASMUS+	
<i>Université de Toulouse</i>	Chargée de projet Erasmus+ hors Europe	France
<i>Université de Toulouse</i>	Responsable du pôle projet de la Direction de la coopération internationale	France
<i>Groupe Junia</i>	<i>Chargé de coopération internationale</i>	France
University of Eastern Finland	Global South Development Manager	Finland
<i>Université d'Abomey Calavi</i>	Communications, Partnerships and Mentoring Officer for the dual degree programme in Oceanography with the University of Toulouse	Benin

Beneficiary	University	Country
Man	UCAD	Senegal
Man	UCAD	Senegal
Man	UCAD	Senegal
Woman	UCAD	Senegal
Woman	<i>Institut International d'Ingénierie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement (2iE)</i>	Burkina Faso
Woman	<i>Institut International d'Ingénierie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement (2iE)</i>	Burkina Faso
Woman	<i>Université de Nouakchott</i>	Mauritania
Woman	<i>Université de Lomé</i>	Togo
Woman	<i>Université de Lomé</i>	Togo
Man	<i>Université de Lomé</i>	Togo
Woman	<i>Université de Nouakchott</i>	Mauritania
Man	<i>Université de Nouakchott</i>	Mauritania
Man	<i>Université de Lomé</i>	Togo
Woman	UCAD	Senegal
Man	<i>Université d'Abomey Calavi</i>	Benin
Man	<i>Université Nangui Abrogoua</i>	Côte d'Ivoire
Man	<i>Université d'Abomey Calavi</i>	Benin

5.2. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Author	Date	Name of Document
EUTF	2017	Description of action
ECOWAS	2010	ECOWAS youth policy and strategic action plan
Erasmus+	2021	Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
Erasmus+	2025	Erasmus+ Programme Guide
Erasmus+	2025	Erasmus+ et le continent africain
European commission	2025	Learning mobility - dashboard
The Erasmus+ Observatory	2017, 2018, 2022	Impact studies

ⁱ UNESCO Institute for statistics, 'Trends in tertiary education: Sub-Saharan Africa', December 2010. Retrieved [here](#).

ⁱⁱ World Bank, 'School enrolment, tertiary (% gross) – Ghana', 5 April 2025. Retrieved [here](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ CEDEAO, '*Politique de la CEDEAO sur la jeunesse et plan d'action stratégique*', July 2010. Retrieved [here](#).

^{iv} Valletta Summit, 'Joint Valletta Action Plan', 11–12 November 2015. Retrieved [here](#).

^v L'Observatoire Erasmus+, '*Analyse des apports de la mobilité Erasmus+ pour les apprenants, les personnels et les organismes*', 29 August 2022. Retrieved [here](#).